AN ONLINE ROUNDTABLE

Curated by Jennifer W. Leung. Featuring Curt Gambetta, Mustafa Faruki, Lori Brown, Filip Tejchman, Michelle Fornabai, Wendy W. Fok, Meejin Yoon, McLain Clutter, Alan Smart, Magdalena Milosz, and Rafi Segal.

Tag-team commentary.

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<u>CURT GAMBETTA</u> ON <u>MUSTAFA FARUKI</u>:

Lab Lab's made-up work for a made-up state seeks to harvest and collect the byproducts of one's emotions. Our contemporary economy is an economy of affects, in every sense of an economy, a science of emotional scarcity and a marketplace of emotions. I see Lab Lab's instrumentalization of affect as a contemporary follow-up to the cybernetic 70s. Designers of the time imagined a similarly continuous relationship between body and system (think of McLuhan's ideas of 'extension'). Specifically, they asked: Who remembers? And what do they—or it—remember? Many projects in the London scene, for instance, sought to store memories and information about an occupant, though they were less interested in what was remembered (content, history) about an occupant than how a system remembers (mechanisms, an epistemology). Only the potential to remember mattered, not the specifics of what was stored away. And indeed, the state devises myriad ways to remember and store the past. Much of the work of the state is to remember. This is the problem of bureaucracy. The project's alliance with the state is in this sense no stretch of the imagination. But it begs the question: why the state? If we tune in to how grief is stored and how it is recalled, can we imagine other alliances, or is the state our most pleasurable horizon? A fetish on par with a fleshlight? Given that the mutual enjoyment of grief is pervasive,

especially during the last few months, I wonder if we see other forms for the transmission and archiving of grief, apart from the logic of the state? Or, conversely, its extension?

MUSTAFA FARUKI ON LORI BROWN:

The buffer between a building's interior and the world outside is a thick, multilayered one, but only a small portion of it is visible. Lori Brown's "Private Choices, Public Spaces" vividly illustrates the sometimes horrendous depth of this threshold, which in some cases includes a daunting day-long return journey of hundreds of miles. And while the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision in *Whole Women's Health vs. Hellerstadt* may go some distance in psychically easing the restrictions of undue burdens, the hard reality of limited access to reproductive care in Mississippi and elsewhere (and the externally imposed fortifications around such care) will, for at least the short term, remain. It is incumbent on progressive architectural education to consider seriously and engage with this *thickspace*—the fraught and contested envelope of politicized architecture. Reactionary forces have already discovered the efficacy of manipulating architecture in their pursuit of multiple agendas; so when will the architectural academy follow suit? With building codes and other design variables safely in the hands of an often unfriendly establishment, the thickspace around politically charged architecture should suggest a powerful opportunity for progressive designers, educators, and their students. In the midst of a shockingly racist and nationalistic presidential campaign, and following the recent massacre in Orlando, architecture schools that care must drag their heavy asses away from the pretense of neutrality where they smilingly teeter precariously—*they must choose sides*. Gay bars, mosques and safe spaces for Latino and transgender communities will increasingly find themselves in artfully conceived cross-hairs: it is up to a future generation of architects to design the citadels.

LORI BROWN ON CURT GAMBETTA:

Trash: there are no rugs left to sweep it under.
-*Milwaukee Journal*, 19 Apr 1970

The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday Morning?
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* 1969

Gambetta's essay demands that we critically question the criticism leveled by some that architecture's service is to provide only object-oriented solutions. What about research's power to reveal invisible structures at play within the built environment? And through these visualizations, design work critiques systems of power and their physical manifestations. This method also produces new systems of knowledge requiring architecture to be informed by and collaborate with adjacent professions.

If the service of architecture is to embrace its full potential to positively affect the world, then the discipline must own research as design and our expertise in systems analysis and visualization in order to first demonstrate the existence of the built environment's politicization before any intelligent action can collaboratively ensue.

FILIP TEJCHMAN ON ANNABEL WHARTON:

The realm of the model is "interesting" because the legibility or transparency of a model's association to a profession, practice or product imbues the latter with a discursive potential—one that corroborates and supports its subjectivity—while simultaneously enabling the formation of other networks of knowledge. In this sense, something can be both objective and "interesting," that is, allowing for interpretation. Models, like scaffolds, have a different relationship to buildings than to the process of construction. What to make of this difference which would seem to celebrate the autonomy of models, yet conspires to reduce them to simply interesting evidence?

MICHELLE FORNABAI ON BEHNAZ FARAHI:

In response to Second Skin, some paradoxes of material implication[1] (written in BEghILOSZ[2]):

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Michelle Fornabai on Behnaz Farahi in BENghILOSZ.

The introductory line of the piece designates the writing as some "paradoxes of material implication" which are defined as "truths of classical logic that are intuitively problematic," with the root of the paradox emerging from "a mismatch between the interpretation of the

validity of logical implication in natural language and its formal interpretation in classical logic." As such, the translated dialogue/argument shows a series of misunderstandings based on the difference between material cues (involuntary, oblique, opaque and cryptic) and meaningful communication (intentional, directed, transparent, encoded). Body/language (or more classically, eros/logos).

The idea of writing in BENghILOSZ (an "an unintended characteristic" of the seven-segment numbers themselves) suggests that projecting meaning into the material qualities of numerical code (like a Rorschach, but on the calculator) can lead to misinterpretation.

WENDY W. FOK ON HOWELER + YOON:
This step by step, procedural article raises an interesting insight into the construction and process of the memorial, yet brings to question whether the digital delivery of the files and the future of project delivery and manufacturing could be more streamlined through better integration of a digital platform and/or an integrated design practice.

With the Internet of Things imploding through the online world and various technology-related fields, could architecture, design and construction combine the same savvy nature of IoT for better project development, rather than the clunky nature of the step by step guide, between architect > fabricator > contract, as outlined by Hoewler and Yoon? As young architects no longer line up to work for the field's undisputed stars, instead launching self-directed crowdsourced projects, using Kickstarter campaigns as a means to fund their own projects and seeking collaborators for projects big and small, could project delivery and the fabrication process become an integrated approach?

MEEJIN YOON ON DENISE SCOTT BROWN:
The questions asked by Denise Scott Brown's lecture at the ParaThesis conference at the Harvard GSD in 2006 are, a decade later, as timely as ever. Within her essay on the studio and its unique pedagogical setup of learning by doing, she asks, "What is research and what is design?" And

her next question, "What is the balance between the two?" makes clear her position on the differences between research and design. Denise further outlines the importance of learning by doing and its relationship to design in studio, arguing that "learning-by-doing really means learning by designing." Today, as the terms of 'design' and 'research' are often conflated, and "design research" as a term has become common, it is more critical than ever to harness the studio as the site and pedagogical framework to test both design and research and/or design research.

MCLAIN CUTTER ON ALAN SMART:

This fascinating piece makes me think about the dialectics of resistance. Can we resist the network organizations characteristic of neoliberal urbanism *through* the network, without inadvertently buttressing neoliberalism? Can we work within a form without becoming its image? Alan's story of the Nieuwmarkt occupation conveys both promise and caution for designers like myself who ask these questions today. While the occupation was clearly successful in limiting the top-down Nieuwmarkt plan to a single subway line with discrete stations, one can't help but wonder whether the void left by the failure of the municipal planning authority's initiative precisely played into the exodus of industry from Amsterdam in the 1980s, the subsequent recession of municipally-sponsored urban development and the emergence of market-based developmental models. Amsterdam did not develop into the commuter city and business center the planning authority imagined. Instead, it became a center of communications and media–together with business, pillars of the immaterial economies of neoliberalism.

ALAN SMART ON FRANCESCA HUGHES:

The fracture and erasure that the architects of SAGE's edifice of paranoia claimed as foundational, justifying fear was the splitting of the atom and the annihilation of a 'nuclear holocaust.' Nuclear weapons, and the regime of frozen terror that the so-called 'Cold War' instituted were, however, only a more perfect, more powerful manifestation of an ideological project fundamental to the synthetic constitution of modernity, capitalism and

enlightenment humanism. Alberti's disembodied 'eye in the sky' had already been literally constructed in the Norden bombsights that had produced the rationalized, flatness of vision necessary for the waging of strategic war on infrastructure and productive capacities human and non-human.

L: Leone Battista Alberti, R: Winged Human Eye (reverse) by Matteo de'Pasti. 1446/1450 Courtesy of National Gallery of Art. Samuel H. Kress Collection. QVID TVM (What next?)

The cybernetic project was effective in the Cold War by being ineffective. The tension of systems-fighting-system made the unreality of the nuclear holocaust real enough to be useful without it actually having to take place. Where it failed was in the real, material conflicts playing out in a reality beyond the capacities of its reductive modeling techniques. A cybernetic counterinsurgency doctrine was developed for Vietnam that began with issuing manuals with logic flow-diagrams on "how to tell if a village is strategic" to green berets struggling to balance winning "hearts and minds," with "search and destroy" missions, and in American cities cybernetic methodologies were applied to quelling the urban insurrections of the late 1960s. Nicholas Negroponte's "Architecture Machine" project at MIT can be seen as a SAGE system for urban planning in which computational models of urban systems were development based on such

dubious data as there results of multiple-choice questionnaires asking urban residents what they would like to see constructed in their communities—while conspicuously avoiding real dialogue, and ignoring or erasing the pressing questions of agency and power in deciding how and by what means construction would take place.

This autistic quality, and the obsessive paranoia that goes with it, is however not a bug but in fact a feature. It was the thing that allowed the cyberneticists and their patrons to stay cool and clean in their blue rooms through the cold war even as so many others around the world struggled, and suffered through bloody proxy wars, dirty wars, colonial 'emergencies,' police actions, 'years of lead,' and long hot summers. It persists today in the 'black box' trading algorithms of financial systems speculating in autonomous detachment from the housing stock upon which the value of their securities is based; underwrites geekish enthusiasm for applying 'big data' modeling techniques human problematics ('smart cities,' 'digital humanities,' etc.) and the willfully blinkered libertarian fantasies of Silicon Valley entrepreneurship; and it offers architecture a diminished, and infantilized formulations 'computational design' and 'maker culture' against real engagement with either critical discourse or work, labor, and production. Whatever the potentials are for architects in reconsidering the cybernetic project, it is important to maintain a clear awareness both of its failures, and ongoing existence as a vital but problematic force in the world.

MAGDALENA MILOSZ ON RAFI SEGAL:

"The virtual is the realm of productivity, of functioning otherwise than its plan or blueprint, functioning in excess of design and intention. This is the spark of the new that the virtual has over the possible: the capacity for generating innovation through an unpredicted leap, the capacity of the actual

to be more than itself, to become other than the way it has always functioned."

- Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Space: Toward an Architecture of Invention," *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Real and Virtual Space* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 130.

The Kibbutz Hatzor expansion expresses a community's desire for an architecture that "stabilizes a social structure and defines a relationship between private and collective life." Stability and definition often characterize architecture; the built fabric is understood as an "instrument" to achieve these ends. A comparison can be made with the Canadian government's houses, schools and other building types for assimilating Indigenous peoples, which served as tools for spatializing racist policies. Traditional, often collective ways of living on the land were distorted into fragmented simulacra of settler communities, the desired goal being the transformation of social relations and thus the diminishment of social cohesion and political potential. The difference is one of agency: who wields the instrument and, thus, who wields power?

RAFI SEGAL ON RYAN KING:

The Foamspace project tackles the burning and important question of creating and managing public space in the contemporary city—potentially partaking in what has been referred to as practices of common space—the 'bottom-up' activation of space for a shared cause, a space created within urban space and occupied for a purpose. The underlining political thinking here is that the city's existing (and official) public spaces have by now become institutionalized and overly controlled, and make it difficult for spontaneous acts of solidarity and support.

Occupy Tel Aviv 2012. Photo by Sara Segal.

The interesting question for me in this case has to do with Foamspace's political, economic and/or social role—in other words, can it become a means to support political protest (by aiding the creation of common space) and to use the bitcoin system for funding (alternative economy as a subversive/untraceable act), or is it destined to be a cool installation for a street party (with Foamspace coins rewards for organizers)?